

IN THE MATTER OF : NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
THE CERTIFICATE OF : STATE BOARD OF EXAMINERS
TROY R. LEONARD : ORDER OF REVOCATION
_____ : DOCKET NO: 1516-203

At its meeting of March 3, 2017, the State Board of Examiners (Board) reviewed information received from the Criminal History Review Unit (CHRU) and the Sussex County Prosecutor's Office regarding Troy R. Leonard. On September 16, 2016, Leonard was accused of two counts of Sexual Assault. On May 10, 2016, Leonard had also been accused of various counts of Sexual Assault, Endangering-Abuse/Neglect/Sexual Acts to a Child and Health Care Fraud-Intentional Fraud. On September 16, 2016, Leonard pled guilty to all of the counts and was sentenced to five years' incarceration and subject to the No Early Release Act with parole supervision for life. The CHRU notified the Board that, as a result of his conviction, Leonard was disqualified from public school employment pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 18A:6-7.1 et seq.* Leonard currently holds a School Counselor certificate, issued in June 2010.

Leonard did not challenge the accuracy of his criminal history record before the Commissioner of Education. Upon review of the above information, the Board voted at its meeting of April 6, 2017 to issue Leonard an Order to Show Cause as to why his certificate should not be revoked.

The Board sent Leonard the Order to Show Cause by regular and certified mail on April 10, 2017. The Order provided that Leonard must file an Answer within 30 days. The certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Leonard did not file a response. Thereafter, on May 24, 2017, the Board sent Leonard another notice by certified and regular mail providing him an additional 15 days to respond to the Order to Show

Cause. The certified mail receipt was signed and returned and the regular mail copy was not returned. Leonard did not file a response.

Thereafter, pursuant to *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(e)*, on June 13, 2017, the Board sent Leonard a hearing notice by regular and certified mail. The notice explained that the allegations in the Order to Show Cause were deemed to be admitted as a result of his failure to file an Answer. Thus, Leonard was offered an opportunity to submit written arguments on the issue of whether the conduct addressed in the Order to Show Cause constituted conduct unbecoming a certificate holder, as well as arguments with regard to the appropriate sanction in the event that the Board found just cause to take action against his certificate. It also explained that, upon review of the charges against him and the legal arguments tendered in his defense, the Board would determine if his offense warranted action against his certificate. Thereupon, the Board would also determine the appropriate sanction, if any. Leonard was also offered the opportunity to appear before the Board to provide testimony on the sanction issue.

On June 22, 2017, Leonard filed a response to the Hearing Notice. In that response, he surrendered “(all) of my teaching Licenses/certifications without contest.” (Hearing Response, p. 1). Leonard added “due to my recent charges, and incarceration I surrender my credentials.” (Hearing Response, p.1).

The threshold issue before the Board in this matter is whether Leonard’s conviction and subsequent disqualification constitute conduct unbecoming a certificate holder or other just cause. Since Leonard did not file an Answer and subsequently did not contest the revocation of his certificate, the allegations in the Order to Show Cause are deemed admitted. *N.J.A.C. 6A:9B-4.6(c)*. Consequently, at its meeting of July 27, 2017, the Board considered only the allegations in the Order to Show Cause and the information received from the CHRU and the

Sussex County Prosecutor's Office. The Board concluded that no material facts related to Leonard's offense were in dispute since he never denied that he engaged in the conduct alleged and therefore determined that summary decision was appropriate in this matter. *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.6(h). After reviewing the allegations, the Board found that Leonard had engaged in unbecoming conduct.

The Board must now determine whether Leonard's conviction and resulting disqualification, as set forth in the Order to Show Cause, represent just cause to act against his certificate pursuant to *N.J.A.C.* 6A:9B-4.4. The Board finds that they do.

In enacting the Criminal History Review statute, *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-7.1 *et seq.* in 1986, the Legislature sought to protect public school pupils from contact with individuals whom it deemed to be a danger. Individuals convicted of crimes such as Sexual Assault, Endangering-Abuse/Neglect/Sexual Acts to a Child and Health Care Fraud-Intentional Fraud fall squarely within this category. The strong legislative policy statement is also in accord with the Commissioner's long-standing belief that teachers must serve as role models for their students. "Teachers... are professional employees to whom the people have entrusted the care and custody of ... school children. This heavy duty requires a degree of self-restraint and controlled behavior rarely requisite to other types of employment." *Tenure of Sammons*, 1972 *S.L.D.* 302, 321. Moreover, unfitness to hold a position in a school system may be shown by one incident, if sufficiently flagrant. *Redcay v. State Bd. of Educ.*, 130 *N.J.L.* 369, 371 (1943), *aff'd*, 131 *N.J.L.* 326 (E & A 1944). In this instance, Leonard's conviction demonstrates behavior that falls far short of a role model.

The strong policy statement on the part of the Legislature set forth in *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-7.1(b) also offers guidance to the Board as to the appropriate sanction in this matter. An

individual whose offense is so great that he or she is barred from service in public schools should not be permitted to retain the certificate that authorizes such service. Nor should a person who has been disqualified from teaching in a public school be permitted to continue to hold himself out as a teacher. Thus, because the Legislature and the Commissioner consider Leonard's offense so significant, the Board believes that the only appropriate sanction in this case is the revocation of his certificate.

Accordingly, on July 27, 2017, the Board voted to revoke Troy R. Leonard's School Counselor certificate. On this 15th day of September 2017 the Board voted to adopt its formal written decision and it is therefore ORDERED that the revocation of Leonard's certificate be effective immediately. It is further ORDERED that Leonard return his certificate to the Secretary of the State Board of Examiners, Office of Certification and Induction, P.O. Box 500, Trenton, NJ 08625-0500 within 30 days of the mailing date of this decision.

Robert R. Higgins, Secretary
State Board of Examiners

RRH/MZ/th

Date of Mailing:
via certified and regular mail

Appeals may be made to the Commissioner of Education pursuant to the provisions of *N.J.S.A.* 18A:6-38.4.